

February 9, 2016

## Testimony to the Michigan State Senate Education Committee

Jonathon Clark

Good afternoon ladies and gentlemen. My name is Jonathon Clark and I am the husband of a true gift and a parent of seven wonderfully amazing children. I am a proud Veteran of the United States Army. I have spent my life serving others...be it my family, community or country. I live in a neighborhood in which there is only one high school and we have the 2nd highest number of high school aged children in the city of Detroit. Our children have to overcome barriers to learning such as blight and crime before they even get to school. The system in place to educate our children in Detroit is and has been broken for some time now. This includes charters, DPS, and EAA. There has been a lot of passing the buck and the blame. I don't want to focus on the problems but rather switch our attention to the solution.

### **Daniel- Detroit Public School**

Close your eyes and allow me to paint a picture for you; you take your son, which just happens to be Autistic aka Special Needs to his first day of school. He arrives at school to meet his classmates and teacher. At the end of the day your son comes home still very much excited about his first day of school and the awesome teacher that he has. Over the next couple of years, you have seen such growth and development in him largely in part to his relationship with his teacher.

One day your son comes home and just doesn't seem as interested as before in school. He informs you that he has a "new" teacher. This may seem normal but in this case something huge was missing. What, you may ask? You were never notified that your son who tries so hard every day to fit in and find a sense of normalcy in this experience we call life now has to build a relationship with a "new" stranger.

I say stranger because your son struggles with bonding and letting people get close to him. If this happened once you might say it was a minor oversight but to force any child to make these types of adjustments (not even considering the battles he already fights daily) is nothing short of cruel. This actually happened FIVE times in one school year.

I had to ask Why? One teacher could no longer afford to work any longer at this school due to the stress (uncertainty about job security), working conditions (Black Mold found in the "Special Needs" classroom w/a pregnant teacher) and lack of adequate resources to perform their jobs. Taking funds that were meant for educating and spending it on debt. That is wrong and unfair to the children of the city of Detroit. The debt should be paid by those that created it. (Slide 6, State EM of DPS Deficit)

### **Dannah- Charter School**

Last school year my wife and I spent the majority of our mornings driving our children to FOUR different schools due to the fact that there are NO quality schools in our neighborhood for our children to attend. I will also tell you that the schools that were in my neighborhood closed without any input from us as parents, residents or stakeholders. We have one high school in our neighborhood, a low performing charter and countless abandoned K-8's. The map on the board, created by 482Forward, and referenced

1. The State of Michigan needs to absorb/pay the debt that was acquired while they were in control of the Detroit Public School System.
2. A local body, accountable to Detroiters, that has oversight over the opening, closing, and planning of all public schools in the city, charters and dps schools need to be created needs to be written into law.
3. The Detroit Board of Education needs to be elected by the people that they serve.
4. EAA schools need to be returned to DPS.

Again, I am pleading with you, for my kids and the other 100,000 kids in Detroit , charter and DPS, to support the bills on the table and to introduce a bill that creates a local body, accountable to Detroiters, that coordinates the opening and closing of charters and dps and holds charter authorizers accountable to Detroiters.